**Situational Analysis : Armani Exchange**

**CCT 324**

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**Table of Contents**

**Section 1 : Situation Description...............................................................................pg. 3**

**Section 2 : Situation Analysis......................................................................................pg. 4**

**2.1 : Structural Frame..................................................................................................pg. 4**

**2.2 : Human Resource Frame......................................................................................pg. 12**

**2.3 : Political Frame......................................................................................................pg. 19**

**2.4 : Symbolic Frame.....................................................................................................pg. 23**

**Section 3 : Conclusions and Recommendations........................................................pg. 30**

**3.1 : Structural.............................................................................................................pg. 30**

**3.2 : Human Resource.................................................................................................pg. 31**

**3.3 : Political.................................................................................................................pg. 32**

**Section 4 : Bibliography.............................................................................................pg. 33**

**Section 1 : Situation Description**

Our situation analysis deals with the scenario of luxury boutiques, and the common occurrence of high end employees overlooking customers based on an assessment of social wealth status. Our choice was primarily influenced by personal experiences, and the fact that all team members could identify with the scenario being realistic and viable for an in-depth analysis.  
  
Our Situation Description is as follows –   
 The incident transpired at an Armani Exchange store, in the well-known shopping center “Square One”. One of our team members, Randheer, was out shopping for winter clothes with his family. This was his first year in Canada and, as an International Student, he was gradually learning the ropes in the safety of his family's presence. While the rest of his family took a break, he decided to keep looking on his own and casually entered “Armani Exchange”. Upon entering, he was immediately met with silence and looks that examined him, top to bottom. The employees were all standing together, as the store was relatively empty, and after looking at him, they proceeded to carry on their conversation without any further acknowledgement of the customer. This was clearly attributed to the fact that the employees made a snap judgment based on appearances, and decided that the customer was not upto the standards of the organization ( Armani ). And therefore not deserving of their service. Whether or not this was in line with the Organization’s perceived structure and objectives is yet to be seen. But this was clearly in direct conflict to how Bolman and Deal states that “Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse”.

This blatant disregard of the HR frame is further emphasized and highlighted in the events that followed. Randheer continued to peruse through various Armani products, despite the complete lack of service, and was eventually joined by his family in the store . But before his family could reach him, they were bombarded with flurries of well wishes and offers of courtesies from the employees. It was only when Randheer walked upto his family that the employees realized their error. They attempted a last ditch effort to save and focus on their attentions on him, but he was already leading his family out.  
  
 This situation highlights a clear lack of clarity in the communication channels between the organization and its employees. It also emphasizes problems that can arise from an organizational structure that is too loose or too tight, and potential fallacies in HR frame of the organization in question. We feel that this provides scope for our analysis to show how/why this highlights potential conflicts that can arise from Armani's overall organisational structure. We plan to execute this by breaking down specifics of the Organization, with regards to the effectiveness of various different frames, and making the necessary evaluations and recommendations.

**Section 2 : Situation Analysis**

**Section 2.1 : The Structural Frame**

A frame is a systematic collection of concepts that enables a greater understanding of what goes on in a business’ day-to-day operations. A structural frame is similar as it organizes where elements need to exist in order for a corporation to be efficient and effective in its operations (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Within this structural frame lie the organizations goals as well as the specialized responsibilities of employees and their relationships. This is vital in order to allow adequate coordination for a well-organized platform of success (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Using this structural frame, Armani’s organizational design will be analyzed in order to determine whether or not they can adapt or react to change and how effective the company will be in such situations. In order to understand exactly what happened in the “situation”. To best understand the overall organization and the environment in which Armani Exchange competes, the whole Armani franchise must be analyzed

The Organization Structure of Armani: The Pyramid

There are two models as to how an organization desires to structure itself. An organization can choose a business model in order to make money in the short run and in the long run as well: Either a Pyramid or a Galaxy scheme *(Kapferer and Bastien*, 140). ‘Armani’ is a company that positions itself on the ‘pyramid’ business model, occupying multiple levels declaring their structure (See Figure1).  Armani’s strategy is creating sub-brands by diversifying their product categories with the signature Giorgio Armani brand at the top of the pyramid in order to set the standard (*Kapferer and Bastien*, 141). Beneath the signature Armani is an entity that provides slightly closer to the reach of the customers, “Armani Collezioni”. Following this are Emporio Armani, Armani Jeans, Armani Exchange, Armani junior, Armani casa, Armani Prive’, Armani Dolci and the recently opened Armani brand hotels in the major cities of the world (*Armani Press*, 2005).

Armani’s Company Pyramid:

Giorgio Armani:

Armani’s company has Giorgio Armani at the top of the pyramid (See Figure 2), since it is the first line established by Armani himself in the 1970’s. (*Funding universe*, 2002) Thus, Armani will always take pride in his first creation (*CNN*, 2006). It carries the designer’s name as well as overseeing the rest of the line of the brand, therefor whenever Armani decides to open in a new market it is evident that a Giorgio Armani boutique will open first to set the standard for the rest of the brand. This parent company is privately owned and run by Giorgio Armani himself, the founder and designer of the brand (*Roll*, 2012).

The Giorgio Armani is indeed a corporate brand with a sole shareholder and it is the line featuring the main collection of couture suits and gowns targeting the elite of the society of ages 35-50 (*Roll*, 2012). The Style and the design of Giorgio Armani’s line is simply a combination between couture and classic bringing the best of men's’ suits and gowns to life. However, the price is very high on this end of the grid (Figure 3).

Armani Collizioni:

Armani Collizioni (previously *Giorgio Armani Le- Collizioni*) is the entity that caters to the segment of customers that love Armani’s designs and would like to wear Armani but cannot afford to do so. The style and designs are simpler than the couture line there for cheaper by around 20% than what the Haute couture sell for. There are eleven stand-alone boutiques of the Colliziono, generally it is sold in high-end department stores or recently combined with an Emporio Armani store.(*Roll*, 2012)

Emporio Armani:

Emporio Armani is a diffusion line that sells high-end clothing targeting young professionals between the age of 25 and 35. The pricing leans more towards the higher end and the style is very consistent with the tastes of those interested. This line is sold strictly in its own freestanding boutiques, there are 122 Emporio Armani boutiques or in mini boutiques in exclusive high-end department stores. EA7 is a sub-label branched out of the Emporio Armani line. It is a high-end sports line that is sold in the store (*Roll*, 2012).

Armani Junior:

It is the line that is created especially for kids. There are fifteen boutiques around the world but products also found in selected high-end department stores (*Roll*, 2012).

Armani Jeans:

There are 15 Standalone Armani Jeans stores. These stores sell Jeans and a few of Emporio Armani’s collection but generally Armani’s Jeans are sold in department stores. The design of the line is completely different than this of Giorgio Armani, The colors diversity and the complexity of the design caters to a very different segment. It is a trendy line so it caters to customers that are 18- 30 years old (*Roll*, 2012).

Armani Exchange:

Armani Exchange is the most accessible line of the Armani brand delivering to a wide range of the market unlike the couture lines. The prices are more realistic for the mass public in return for the feel of the luxurious brand name designs of Giorgio Armani. With over 235 stores around the world, Armani Exchange has the highest number of stores since it caters to the biggest segment of prospective customers (*Roll*, 2012).

Armani Casa:

Armani Casa is an exclusive Armani Italian designer furniture line. This store caters to high-end home décor and furniture featuring, lamps, linens, and dining essentials. There are only 40 exclusive boutiques worldwide. (*Funding universe*, 2002)

Armani Hotels:

Armani Hotels are a series of hotels opening in the major cities of the world like Dubai, Milan and London. Giorgio Armani oversees all the designs of the hotels from the biggest details to the finest. The series of Hotels and residences are furnished completely by Giorgio Armani from his line Armani Casa, making it that much more exclusive (*Armani Hotels and Resorts*, 2012).

**Mintzberg’s Divisional Forms:**  
 Armani the organization follows Mintzberg’s Divisionalized form (See Figure 4). Each brand line is a division serving a distinct market and running its own functional units under the umbrella of one huge parent company the “Giorgio Armani”. Giorgio Armani said: “I have always paid great attention to having brands that don’t overlap. I choose a brand for a particular market and balance my collections in terms of look, price, distribution and location.” The divisions of the Armani brand lines are based on the pricing, management, distribution and marketing (*Piergiorgio,* 2010). Each line of the Armani brand has its own committed style, product and brand manager, sales and communications, and its own Public Relations staff. Nevertheless, all the brand lines are closely supervised by the brand creator himself Giorgio Armani (*Piergiorgio,* 2010). Having a Divisionalized structure is very beneficial for a large organization such as Armani. This structure offers benefits such as economies of scale, resource allocation, and responsiveness while still controlling economic risks (Bolman and Deal, 84). Some argue that having an individual overlook every divisional manager is tedious and may lead to the head of the organization losing touch with operations, however Armani prides himself in the interfering in every sector organization and adjusting it how he sees fit (*Roll*, 2012). The Armani brand is built on the foundation of its’ founder Giorgio Armani. His interconnectedness within the organization is the main competitive advantage for the company (*Roll*, 2012). Giorgio is the sole shareholder and the CEO of the complete brand where he supervises the designs of every aspect of the brand. There are no other designers or leaders that are trained to carry on operations without Giorgio Armani. *(Davidson*, 2009)

**Analysis of the Structural frame**

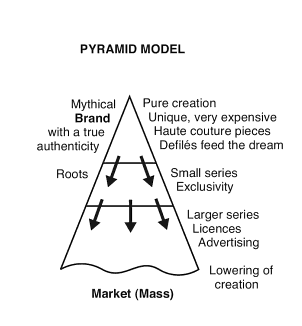
Armani greatly emphasizes their logo and their brand and this is evident through their corporate structure. From upper management to the fore front employees, the brand name is stressed. While this message is communicated, it is not effectively acted upon due to major flaws in the organizational structure. Armani employs two types of working units; those established around customers and those around a certain place or geography (Bolman and Deal, 2008). This is evident through the various brands Armani has to cater to different types of customers (i.e. Armani Exchange for ordinary consumers, Emporio Armani for more high end consumers, etc.) and the distribution of them across the retail landscape.

The Armani Exchange store, the brand under analysis, uses both lateral and vertical coordination to structure their operations. Vertical coordination uses methods such as authority, rules, and planning systems to communicate the Armani message to employees (Bolman and Deal, 2008). As discovered through an interview with a former Armani Exchange employee, managers are given a high degree of authority. They are assigned with ensuring store operations are aligned with company goals and frequently stress the Armani logo and brand on the employees. The managers also stress performance controls by emphasizing sales goals and rewarding the employees with the highest sales. They, however, do not explain how these goals are to be met. Armani Exchange also utilizes some lateral coordination such as meetings. These weekly meetings, however, only occur between the managers and exclude employees. The person interviewed was a Sales assistant and a cashier whom said that there were never meetings scheduled for them with the managers. However, there were five managers for one branch and they meet regularly every week where the rest of the staff were not allowed to participate and were not notified as to what went on during the meeting.

After analyzing the structure of the Armani Exchange store, it is evident that much structural inefficiency exists in the organization of the store. The main flaw is the lack of communication to the employees. While managers have frequent meetings to discuss sales goals and overall company objectives, these are not communicated to the front line sales associates. News such as what sales goals are, which employee met them, and other crucial information are all posted on a board through which the employees get their updates for the week. During the interview with the Armani Exchange employee, it was also discovered that managers gave high importance to sales goals and greatly rewarded the employees with the highest sales. While they communicated these goals, they did not instruct the employees on how to achieve them, leaving them to understand that on their own.

The high emphasis on sales goals left employees narrowed in on achieving good sales, which were thereby done through profiling their customers, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In a store where managers rewarded and respected high sales employees, the rest of the sales associate team could not afford to give time to customers they felt would not make purchases. If they did, they would fall behind in sales and lose opportunity to display good work performance to their managers. This, however, created a disconnection between the consumers and the Armani Exchange brand or company goals. Armani Exchange, in comparison to other Armani brands, is the affordable brand targeted towards more everyday consumers. Nevertheless, even in this situation, the behavior of the sales associates portrays the brand as one that only has time for high worth consumers, causing a rift between what Armani is actually trying to achieve with their Armani Exchange stores.

Figure 1:



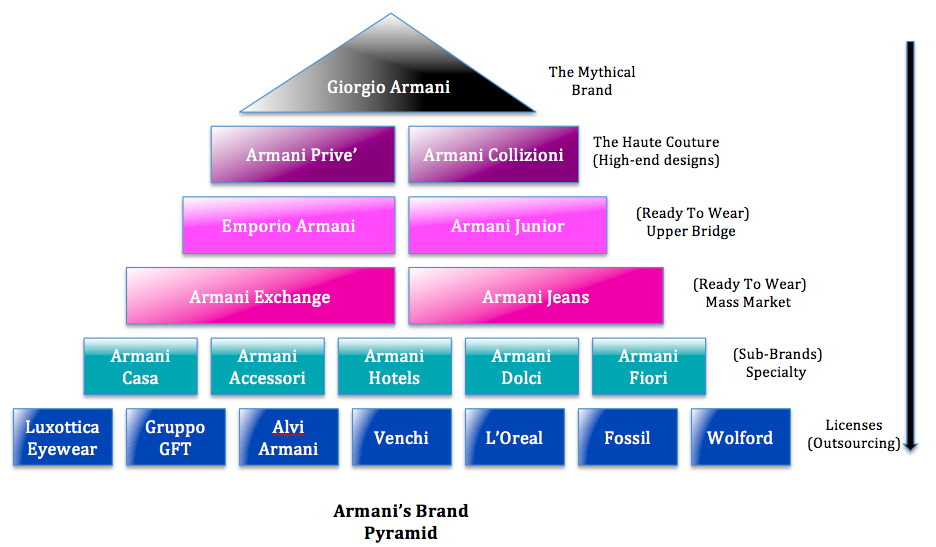


Figure 2:

Figure 3:

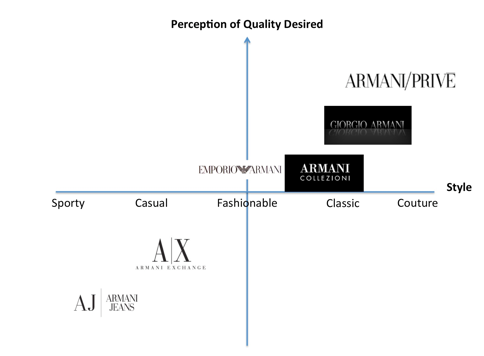
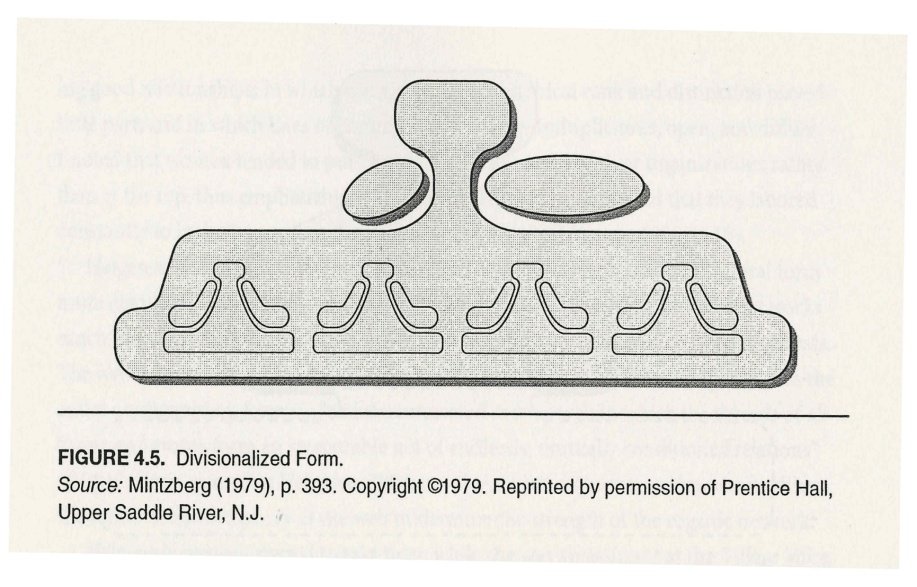
Figure -3-

Figure 4:



**Section 2.2 : The Human Resource Frame**

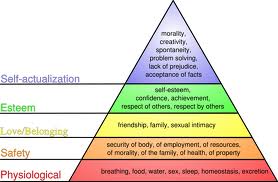
The Human Resource frame naturally plays a pivotal role within any organization, regardless of its nature. Important contentions to keep in mind, are that employees form the backbone of an organization and the appeasement of their needs and wants is almost as significant as the appeasement of a customers' needs and wants. Especially with boutiques and fashion outlets like Armani Exchange, the employees personify the image of the organization within the eyes of the customer. Any errors or mistakes conducted on the employees part, is likely to be directly attributed to the organization in question. Likewise, an extremely good impression cultivated by the employees is also likely to be directly translated towards the organizations benefit. Thus, the satisfaction of its employees is integral in mitigating the effects of negative events, like the one in our situation description.

The root cause of our situation emanated from a lack of respect shown towards a customer, on the behalf of an employee, and so the focus of this frame will center around sales representatives and upper management. This frame will look to breakdown the event, analyse the context behind it's triggering events and effects, draw comparisons with relevant management theories, and look to formulate the necessary recommendations.

Firstly, it is important that we establish the context behind the scenario. Even though Armani is pre-dominantly recognized as a luxury line, it has implemented several brand extension schemes in order to access larger, more diverse markets. As a result, we have the likes of Emporio Armani and Armani Baby. Armani Exchange, the store specific to our situation, is the outlet recognized to be targeting the more youthful and urban customer and this is reflected in their promotion strategies, prices and employees. It is important to note, however, that despite that tangible differences between the myriad of Armani brands, employees still face similar levels of pressure exerted by upper management. Despite the clear differences in overall objectives, targeted demographics and price range of products, the dominant focus remains on enhancing productivity by maintaining a high level of competition among its sales representatives. The significance of fostering such an environment is touched upon by Bolman and Deal, who explains that "Everyone knows that organizations can be alienating, dehumanizing, and frustrating. Such conditions waste talent, distort lives, and motivate people to pull out or fight back, devoting much of their time and effort to beating the system. The human resource frame offers another possibility: an organization can also be energizing, productive, and mutually rewarding." ( Bolman and Deal, 2008 )

One of the keystone assumptions of the Human Resource Frame is that "organizations exist to serve human needs" and "when the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization-or both become victims" ( pg.115 ) Drawing parallels to the natural eco-systems that surround us, studies have showed that employees are recognized to be moulded according to their workplace environment. The significance of their work environment is such that it is integral to their survival and evolution. As a result, there are many factors of consideration to take into account when dealing with an organizations relationship with its employees, and one of the prevalent concerns is the fulfillment of basic needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs :



In the case of Armani, and Armani Exchange in particular, our studies have revealed several conflicts of needs with relevance to our Situation. More specifically, we have deduced that the root cause of the employee's ignorance towards the customer, is a direct result of Armani failing to address the needs of "Belongingness", "Esteem", and "Self- Actualization". This contention is backed up by interviews conducted with previous Armani employees, which indicates an unhealthy pattern of fostering favoritism, competition and rivalry amongst untrained sales staff. Excerpts from individual interviews can be found in the corresponding APPENDIX .

As shown in the interviews, there exists a plethora of barriers constricting Armani Exchange sales staff from achieving their maximum potential, or gaining maximum job satisfaction, as employees. The primary issues of concern surround the notion of commission based salaries , the lack of a professional employee integration program, and the involvement of upper management in generating or poaching sales.

Commission based salaries, as a productivity incentive, functions as a double edged sword. From an organizations standpoint, it correlates a definitive relation between effort and pay on the behalf of the employees, and as such, can lead to higher rates of efficiency. From the perspective of a salesperson, it can lead to unnecessary, rabid and malicious competitiveness among fellow staff - leading to a direct opposition of Maslow's need for "belongingness and love". Further evidence of Armani Exchange's lack of consideration towards its employees is manifested in the form of controversial news reports that point towards wrongful termination and discrimination based on health and religious preferences - yet another notion that directly ignores the human need for belongingness and security.

This fundamental need is further jeopardized alongside the needs of "Esteem" and "Self-Actualization" with Armani Exchange's program that incorporates managers within the commission scheme. Such a program effectively entails that an employee is in competition with his/her entire work environment as even the manager can poach sales ( as demonstrated by several interviews in APPENDIX ) This directly puts the employee at odds against upper/middle management, and can lead to multiple organizational conflicts.

The lack of a comprehensive employee training program also has its fair share of negative side-effects to accompany the cost-cutting benefits. Whereas the cost-saving measures are clear for all to see, this can directly lead to conflicts in the workplace emanating from a lack of experience and co-ordination among employees.

" Global competition, turbulence, and rapid change have heightened an enduring organizationaldilemma: Is it better to be lean and mean, or to invest in people? Emerging evidence suggests that downsizing has often produced disappointing results. Many highly successful organizations have gone in another direction: investing in people on the premise that a highly motivated and skilled workforce is a powerful competitive advantage." ( Bolman and Deal, 2008 )

There are two managerial strategies that can be implemented in deducing the nature of such employee conflict, and the events that are commonly recognized to follow.

Firstly, we have McGregor and managers can fall under either one of his two schools of thought : Theory X and Y . Theory X entails that managers consider employees as lazy, passive and having minimal ambition with wages being the only incentive. Such a version emphasizes the need for managerial tactics like "coercion , tight controls, threats, and punishments" ( Bolman and Deal, 2008 ). Conversely, theory Y entails the recognition of an employees need for physiological satisfaction and methods to promote this includes the alignment of organization values in accordance with "employee self interest". ( Bolman and Deal, 2008 )

Failing to meet these requirements, and the lack of substantial investment in employees can lead to several patterns, as discussed by Chris Argyris. He narrowed down that people tend to follow one of 6 trends, when dealing with organizational conflict :

- withdraw

- become apathetic, passive, indifferent

-resist (sabotage, featherbedding, deception)

-try to climb hierarchy to better jobs

- form groups (unions)

-teach children negative things about work

( Bolman and Deal, 2008 )

Clearly illustrated among the tirade of employee complaints, are patterns of withdrawal, becoming apathetic, resisting, and attempts to climb hierarchy. All these aspects can be directly attributed to the influence exerted by Armani Exchange and its management policies. This contention has its evidentiary foundations centered around the fact that "Argyris and McGregor formed their views on the basis of observations of American organizations in the 1950s and 1960s. Since then, investigators everywhere have documented similar conflicts between people and organizations. Orgogozo (1991), for example, contended that typical French management practices caused workers to feel humiliation, boredom, anger, and exhaustion “because they have no hope of being recognized and valued for what they do” ( Bolman and Deal, 2008 )As a result, it is imperative that AX attempts to align itself under McGregor's theory Y, as opposed to theory X, in order to appeal to basic self actualization requirements and successfully mitigate conflict in accordance with Argyris' trends.

**Appendix A - Interviews[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Armani Exchange Sales Associate ( Past Employee - 2011 )

*" The competitiveness. Sales is EVERYTHING. You are expected to sell a certain amount per hour. Even if the store is closed. I worked at a place where there were a lot of Asian tourists that couldn't speak English, so even though I made a sale to them, they weren't able to tell the person working the register, making that sale I have invalid. Coworkers steal your sales. People working register play favoritism and give sales to others, even if it was yours. NO training. "*

**Armani Exchange** **Sales Associate** (Current Employee)

*"Sales incentives can be difficult to hit if you are not self motivating. Senior management should develop a better sales training program ! "*

**Armani Exchange Sales Associate** in **Costa Mesa, CA**:   (Past Employee - 2011)

*" Sometimes you are stuck with all closing shifts and that works against your sales goals. Sales goal incentives are kind of high because of the amount of money the store brings in. and it does not fluctuate according to the actual amount that statistics has for the stores sales in any given month. sometimes its unfair to have to sell against your teammates when theres a lot of sales people on the floor. a lot of strong personalities here so be on your toes and watch your sales like a hawk. "*

**Armani Exchange** **Sales Associate**:   (Past Employee - 2012)

*" Management acted on emotion rather than staying professional. Unrealistic sales goals for the amount of store traffic. Favoritism obvious among staff. Commission hard to attain with low traffic "*

Armani Exchange Anonymous contributor ( Past Employee - 2012 )

*" The newlywed stage is wonderful. It after that time that it all goes down hill. Senior management is never satisfied with store results from a high volume or low volume store. Work from open to close and even on days off in order to keep yourself from getting written up and even then it may still happen. Some Sunday work days 1 manager coverage with no break until the store closes. Or just inhale your lunch as if you were taking a bathroom break due to the fact that a manager you cannot be off the floor. The only positive was to learn about the companys culture and its commission based structure."*

**Armani Exchange Sales Associate** in **San Francisco, CA**:   (Current Employee)

*-The whole commission thing. Commission is really difficult (nearly impossible) to get. You basically have to have an average "Sales per hour" (SPH) of $500+ in order to get 2% of your sales. If you don't achieve this average, even if you're a great associate, you don't get commission.*

*-Note: There is another option for commission but, it is so little that it's almost not worth it.*

*-The atmosphere on the sales floor is almost unbearable at times. Because we have the VERY small chance of getting commission, it's extremely competitive and really awkward a lot of the time. And on top of it all, our sales are posted for everyone to see each week and that determines how many hours we get. Also opening and closing hours are calculated into our sales. So, say you show up at work for 4 hours starting at 7am and sell $1000. But the store doesn't open until 9am. Your sales per hour will only be $250 and not $500 like it should be. This is stupid and doesn't make sense on any level.  
  
-People Will Steal Your Sales! Including managers. I had a manager steal a $200 sale. I helped a client pick out a product, told him a bunch of info, told him about the sale we had going on (which he didn't know about), convinced him AND his friend to make the purchase, and got them the products from the stockroom. When I got to the register, a manager said "oh I was helping one of those guys before you did" and took the sale. Like okay if you were, you should have said something AND if you were, he would have already known about the sale we had.  
  
-There is little to no training for associates which creates huge problems. It's sometimes embarrassing because a lot of the other associates don't really know the products or basic things about fashion and retail. I constantly overhear conversations other associates are having with clients and am shocked by what I hear. Then, I am asked a question by a client and have to contradict what another associate told them because either they weren't properly trained or weren't given proper/clear information by the managers.*

*-Lead. Seriously there could be a lot of improvement if the managers were just clear and direct in what they expected. If you're not completing your task fast enough, you should be told or assigned a different task.  
  
-Managers shouldn't have sales goals. It's counter-productive and interferes with sales associates' selling goals.  
  
-Train new employees. I really can't get over the fact that there is barely any training. Someone shouldn't be working in a store when they don't know the difference between leather & PVC, silver & steel, or synthetic fibers & wool. Not only that but, if someone doesn't know basic information about the products they're selling, it makes the company (and the other associates) look bad.*

**Section 2.3 : The Political Frame**

Organizations comprise of different groups of people, who are varied in their skills, backgrounds, and ideals. An organization is described by Bowman and Deal (p. 186), as living, screaming political arenas, which host a complex network of individual and group interests. The problem that arises in most organizations is the manner of molding this organizational diversity into a decision making unit which is beneficial to the organization. Organizational politics arises during this process of manipulating the divergent organizational views. Bowman & Deal’s political frame brings out five views, which are in organizational politics. These views include;

* Organizations are normally coalitions,
* There are normally enduring differences arising among coalition members,
* Crucial decisions entail allocating scarce resources,
* Scarce resources & enduring differences make conflicts central and power the most crucial asset, and
* Goals and decisions originate from bargaining and negotiating for positions among competing stakeholders

The Armani clothing company is one of the most successful companies in the clothing industry. The company is popularly known for its sale of elegant and sophisticated designer clothes. The prices for the products retailed in Armani stores are normally high; hence, the majority of Armani customers are the rich. The situation of focus in this case is where the Armani customers refused to give their services to Randheer because he did not seem to be rich enough to qualify as an Armani store customer. This incidence happened in the popular Square One shopping center, a subsidiary store of the Armani Company.

In this portion of the paper, we are going to analyze this Armani situation in the light of the political framework as outlined by Bowman & Deal. We are going to do our analysis basing on the five views of the political frame.

**Organizations are Coalitions**

Organizations are coalitions of different individuals who hold divergent view on different issues in the organization. Large organizations such as Armani have several sub-groups individuals and individual people who have private agendas. These various groups and individuals, however, must come together in order to achieve a greater set goal. In the traditional organizational structure, few upper-level workers have enormous power, while many bottom level workers have no or limited power and they are obliged to follow orders issued by top-level workers.

The situation in the Armani store, in view of many people, shows that the store despises serving people who are not wealthy. This, however, basing on the political frame may not be correct. This is because the situation can be looked at from the perspective that employees who were on duty when Randheer walked into the store had their own personal agendas and were not serving in the interest of the company. The employees may have formed a coalition whose intension is to serve only customers that appear to be rich. One reason for wanting to serve rich people may be because there are substantial chances of being given tips.

It is, however, the responsibility of the managers at Armani to identify this problem of employees having personal agendas and implement measures that will ensure the effects are eliminated or reduced.

This situation can also be attributed to the fact that, in a coalition of organizations, hierarchical structures do not exist. Here, different players negotiate with each other for specific benefits, roles, and power. In a coalition, power is not held by only one individual or group\; instead, it is delegated to particular individuals or groups. In view of coalitions, it is beneficial that organization managers consider other employee levels as well as put in an effort to determine which workers are most likely to form coalitions in favor of each option. Expecting possible coalitions can help the organization management to establish important political strategies such as identifying negotiable issues and securing ties with key supporters.

**Enduring Differences**

According to Bowman and Deal (p.187), coalitions, such as that made by the Armani employees, are made of persons with varied differences in beliefs, values, information, perceptions of reality, and interests. It is believed that these differences can increase political activity since they bring diversity to the organization. Enduring differences are in most cases found in those beliefs which are arguable and differences in values held. When put under debate, they enlighten the process of decision making to the benefit of an individual and its coalition members. Organizations should embrace an inclusive process and break away from the traditional hierarchical structure if they want coalitions that have endured differences to be successful. The management also needs to create an environment in which coalition members can be able to air their opinions without fear of victimization.

Therefore, the management of the Armani store need to hold meetings with their employees and allow them to air their views about the reasons which may have led to them ignoring Randheer when he walked in. The Armani store’s employees may also be asked to clarify their reasons of giving Mr. Randheer’s family more attention than what they gave the customer himself.

**Allocating Scarce Resources**

The issue of scarce resources is prevalent in many organizations. Scarce resources may mean limited staff, limited time, limited expertise, or limited money. Organizations are subjected to limited resources problem because of external forces such as revenue, the market, and the political process. Limits concerning the hiring or the staff size tend to motivate a business entity to either: discard a course of operation, scale down, or adapt a temporary solution such as use of contractors. Scarcity of time may lead an organization into making quick decisions, set up chances of groupthink, and lay excessive emphasis on short term issues, as opposed to long term organizational goals.

In the situation with Armani store, it can be argued that the employees hesitated to give their services to Randheer ( the customer ) because they were focusing on the short-term objective of utilizing their services on customers who had potential to make high sales instead of the long term objective of serving all employees well and accumulate good will.

In terms of knowledge and expertise, the organization is always at the mercy of the knowledge holder if there is a shortage of expertise on a subject. The knowledge holders may be contractors or organization individuals. Finally, scarce resources influence the politics of organizations because they initiate confrontation between groups of individuals with varied and even incommensurate values. This pushes management to exert influence and time to mediate debates and clarify organizational values and organizational beliefs. It also forces the management to choose between their organization, that of their department, and their own beliefs.

**Power as an Asset**

Varying interests and scarce resources create conflict. In the political frame, a conflict is not a definite problem. They brought out as being inevitable and natural in nature. Key members of organizational coalitions utilize their power in persuading other individuals to accept their opinion. Because of this, power is regarded as an asset. According to Bowman and Deal (p.170), power comes in varied forms, which range from personal or authoritative power to controlling rewards and agendas. From this point of thinking, power comprises of far more than such normal management techniques such as controlling pay levels, punishments, and job appointments. It also includes the power to utilize ones expertise, influence or charisma to revise points of contention gain backing from other coalition forces.

Management must utilize power wisely. Authoritative power is ineffective because subordinates only abide by it out of fear or respect. Managers exercising this power are left no power once fear and respect are gone. This type of power, therefore, should be utilized cautiously by managers. It is advisable that managers rely on other sources of power, persuasion, and expertise so as to maintain their status within the organization. When this is applied to the situation at the Armani store, it can be said that Armani managers use authoritative power to force employees to abide by the customer service regulations which requires that customers are served to their satisfaction. The managers might have been away when Randheer entered the store; hence, the employees took this opportunity to rebel against the authoritative power by not serving Randheer right.

**Goals and Decisions**

With the knowledge that resources are scarce, organization members with enduring differences needs to find a way of coming to a common consensus so as to make decisions. Bowman and Deal (p. 187), bring out the assumption decisions within an organization are made by competing organization members through bargaining and negotiation, and not in a top-down manner. Individual organization members utilize their resources and influence to get backing for their positions from within the organization. In developed organizations, groups that are in competition with each other must be able to determine which points are beneficial and give up on minor points so as to be able to make decisions. A decision made in this manner does not resemble either group’s original idea, but, rather reflect a compromised decision of the two. It is important that managers prevent conflicts between diverse members from turning into attacks.

Therefore, it is important that the managers at Armani store find a lasting solution to such a problem. Managers may have divergent views on whether to market Armani stores as a prestigious shopping centre so as to capture the rich, or to market it as a luxury store where every member of the society can buy from so long as they have the needed cash. In making decisions on such matters, the managers must compromise their positions and settle on a compromised decision which is in the best interest of the Armani store as a business entity.

**Section 2.4 : The Symbolic Frame**

Symbols are powerful tools through which intellectual and emotional messages may be communicated (Bolman & Deal, 2009) and the world of Fashion is a symbol intensive industry (Saviolo, 2001). As a whole, there are few other industries in which notions of symbolism have garnered greater influence. Symbols in fashion share an intrinsic relationship with the craftsmen and women who dedicate their lives to the manipulation of textiles. Beyond the physical alterations known to define the quality of their craft, these artisans employ symbols in many forms, though none more pervasively perhaps, than through the branding of their products. Symbols as logos are used by designers to instill emotional associations with the product brands they create (Kapferer, 1992; Aaker, 1994). Similarly, within an organizational context symbols offer more than graphic representations of a brand. They manifest as extensions of a corporations culture. They serve as an immediate connection through which employees can relate to one and other (Bolman & Deal, 2009) and offer a common interest through which their efforts can be aligned. As organizational theorists Bolman & Deal suggest, symbolism is rooted in faith, meaning and belief (2009). When interpreting situations through the symbolic frame it is not the specifics of the circumstance which are of importance rather, what the meaning of those circumstances are (Bolman & Deal, 2009). Framing our situation through a symbolic lens affords us the ability to tender yet another perspective on the conditions through which our circumstance arose.

As one might expect an organization which makes its livelihood selling luxury, fashion, image and lifestyle (Hirst, 2009; Roll, 2002-2012) may have a tendency to align naturally with the aesthetically themed notions of symbolism. Of importance here is the question of what these symbols actually represent? Beyond the obvious collection of carefully stylized letters which make up the ‘A-R-M-A-N-I’ logotype, what do these figures truly mean? Briefly, let us explore the values of the designer himself, so as to collect an informed position of his, and by extension his company’s character. In so doing we will glean insight into the motivations inspiring the company’s evolution and ultimately the realization of its pedigree. This milieu will help to position our analysis of the situation as it is presented.

Over the past 37 years Armani as a brand has evolved to become a leader in the fashion industry (Colli & Merlo, 2007). From its humble beginnings in 1974 Milan, with the release of its first menswear collection (Famous Logos, 2012; Roll, 2002-2012; FragranceX.com, 2012), to its present day empire spanning more than 37 countries worldwide (Roll, 2002-12). Armani maintains the success of his vision is based on the everyday person and that clothes should be made to be worn and not just seen (FragranceX.com, 2012). The company mission echoes similar themes striving for “quality that conveys a sense of permanence…” (fundinguniverse.com, n.d.) in lieu of public pressures for novelty. We may interpret from this decree the designer’s affinity towards practicality –form serving function– rather than simply fashion for the sake of fashion. Aligning with this notion of ‘universal appeal’ in a 2009 interview in *Metropolitan Home* written by Arlene Hirst, Armani countered critic’s claims of elitist associations, prescribing to the idea of ‘democratic luxury’ (Hirst 2009). Armani maintains that his designs are intended to have applications for all audiences lending, “*I really want all sorts of people to be able to experience the Armani look*” (G. Armani as cited in Hirst, 2009). What is relevant to our analysis here is an appreciation for the philosophy with which Armani approaches his designs. The expressions in these statements offer insight into the values which both Armani and his company possess. Business and brand strategist Martin Roll observes this as a common occurrence amongst designer led fashion houses. The phenomenon is what he explains as the ‘founders dilemma’ in which the core beliefs and values of the company are based solely on its founding figure (Roll, 2012), or in this case Giorgio Armani himself. With the aforementioned as context we will next explore the environment within which our situation occurred.

Our focus then shifts towards an exploration of the salient physical aspects of the store itself. As will be explained in detail below, the Armani organization has invested much thought into the design and layout of it’s A|X Armani Exchange (A|X) retail locations. We will apply these environmental observations in our symbolic framing, and use these insights to further support the theories from which we will draw in our analysis.

The first A|X retail location was launched in 1991 in Soho-New York (Armani AR, 2008). The A|X label is a sub-brand of the larger parent Armani brand. The store is geared towards a new generation of fast-fashion consumers (Armani AR, 2008), and was introduced as a way of capitalizing on the popularity of the Armani Brand (Roll, 2002-2012; fundinguniverse.com, n.d.). The store features a more accessible collection of clothing and accessories based on urban lifestyle and music culture. (Armani AR, 2008). The specific location which has become the target in our analysis resides in the Square One shopping centre located in the heart of Mississauga, Ontario.



In general, A|X stores are designed to deliver a warm and accessible atmosphere recognized as appealing to the ‘casual sophistication’ of the A|X consumer (Armani AR, 2008). The outlets assume flexible layouts comprised of logically sub-divided spaces delineated by product shelving along the perimeter walls (Armani AR, 2008). Special suffused lighting offers the allure of spotlights and serves the dual purpose of highlighting special display garments while tracing the contours of the store (Armani AR, 2008). The streamlined fittings serve to create an elegant and refined environment in which to present the merchandise on sale (Armani AR, 2008). Throughout the store, large backlit posters featuring male and female models showcase the product and reinforce the lifestyle the brand offers. Behind the purchase counters resides an extended series of horizontally aligned digital displays. These displays feature montages of imagery highlighting the most current product offerings (B. Payne, personal communication, March 17, 2012). It is by no accident that these A|X locations look the way they do. The stores are a result of a carefully executed branding strategy and serve the distinct purpose of enveloping customers in the Armani experience. A|X stores act as shrines within which the product is to be celebrated. In this shrine employees take on the role of brand ambassadors embodying the spirit of the brand as much through their attire and comportment, as they do through their interactions with customers. We will explore this concept further in the following paragraphs as we delve deeper into the role the employee contributes to the overall A|X experience.

Our exploration into the employee’s role leverages first hand knowledge obtained through an interview with an ex-A|X sales associate. In this interview many of the major concepts of the symbolic frame were addressed. The subsequent elaborations will highlight some of the more salient findings and draw emphasis on the points most relevant to our analysis.

A|X employees are indoctrinated into the Armani experience immediately upon entering the store during on-boarding. The use of the A|X logo is pervasive extending to all items including signage, manikins, product labels, posters, corporate stationary and pens right down to individual employee name tags. The A|X logo is used as a rallying point around which new employees could congregate, and serves as a common element from which initial team building exercises could begin. Beyond the logo itself, value was communicated through the stores clothing. Employees were instructed to “sell the look” and emphasis was placed on personal style. Further emphasis was placed on unique customer experiences. Employees were encouraged to interact with customers on a first name basis. A chic ‘club like’ atmosphere prevailed. In some instances (typically Saturday nights) the store would bring in DJ’s to play music, reinforcing its inherent relationship with music culture. In fact our interview revealed that on occasion the downtown location even went as far as to serve alcohol to its customers. To the A|X store managers, their sales associates were not just facilitating the sale of Armani merchandise rather they were creating a memorable experience closely tied to the philosophies upon which the brand had been based.

Beyond the experiential customer facing front which employees were expected to uphold, an altogether separate perspective was being communicated internally. Notions of a ‘corporate vision’ were exchanged for emphasis on sales targets. From the perspective of the sales associate, the store manager’s message was clear. The true ‘raision-d’etre’ was sales. The working environment in A|X is highly competitive. Employees competed with each other as well as against other store locations. The Mississauga location sales results were frequently compared with those of the downtown location. Exceptional performance was rewarded through a commission based incentive program. Rewards were issued for both meeting and exceeding sales targets. Top performers fulfilled the role of Heroes and Heroines. These sales associates were revered, and under performers were encouraged to be more like them. If poor performance continued, then those sales associates witnessed a reduction in shifts. Along with monetary incentives, merchandise was also used as a motivator. Gift cards rewarded exemplary behaviour. Throughout holiday periods celebrations were shared as employees were given gift cards, clothing and accessories from the store.

Despite the divisive nature of the competitive sales environment at A|X, managers employed separate tactics to counter these effects. Through a combination of play and ritual managers attempted to strengthen team bonds. During training employees were taught company chants in which all employees participated. In some circumstances employees were tasked with making up songs to which they then had to dance. In these instances self expression was widely embraced. Managers pushed these as opportunities for sales associates to ‘come out of their shells’ an valuable skill for individuals in sales positions. Themes were also used to further build team cohesion. Each month a new colour was selected and employees resorted to creative applications of those in their wardrobe. These light hearted activities serve the dual purpose of encouraging innovation and personal flare, as well as fostering affable engaging competition amongst employees.

In the preceding paragraphs we presented three influences impacting (directly or indirectly) the outcome of the situation we selected for our analysis. First we explored the influence of the values of Armani himself. Secondly, we explored the influence of the physical store environment, and third we explored the influence of the employee. Throughout each of these explorations we considered various aspects of the symbolic frame. Our position stated that it was a combination of these factors which manifested itself into a poor customer experience. Applying a dramaturgical view affords a framework through which we can observe the interconnectedness of each of the aforementioned influences. In this context, the A|X location in Mississauga acts as our ‘stage’ upon which our ‘production’ (or the negative customer experience) plays out. The employee & customer become our ‘actors’ and the company values are the ‘script’ by which we expect the scene to unfold. The aptness of the metaphor extends further still recognizing both the employee’s and customer’s attire as ‘costumes’, and the store atmosphere appealing to the metaphors of ‘ambiance’ and ‘lighting’. What we note in our assessment is the unexpectedness of our productions outcome. Contributing to this are a few elements. First, our customer ‘actor #1’ was missing his costume, and thus fell outside of the scripted image of what was deemed appropriate customer attire. Second, our employee or ‘actor #2’, not only missed their lines but subsequently ad-libbed an inappropriate monologue deviating away from the traditional the customer – employee dialogue. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the company values, or our ‘script’ seems to have been issued a re-write.

Exiting the metaphor, the conclusion which we are left to draw is reflected in what seems to be a disconnect between the core values of Armani the designer, and a self serving agenda issued at the store level. As we know from our initial exploration Armani professes his work is for the common folk. This value is further aligned through what we understand to be the role of the A|X sub-brand leveraging the Armani namesake though diversifying into otherwise in-accessible markets. Our observations suggest this message seems to loose traction at the store level. Given the results oriented high pressure sales environment in which sales associates operate, they feel forced to look for ways to improve their sales targets. In this particular case the sales associate engaged in a customer profiling exercise through which they determined our customer did not meet the standard of what they deemed to be a worth while investment of their sales effort.

From this analysis we identify two competing interests, residing at the core of this issue. The first is the altruistic design oriented interest asserting functional fashion for all, and the second is the bottom line profit driven interest concerned with maximizing return on investment.

In the following section we will offer a series of recommendations outlining how the Armani organization may look to improve the manner in which they orient themselves moving forward to ensure future circumstances do not unfold in a similar way.

**Section 3 : Conclusions and Recommendations**

**Section 3.1: Structural**

Our findings according to the structural frame within Armani’s company consist of a combination of positive and negative notes. Armani as a brand is structured as a pyramid divided according to quality and price. The organization is carefully structured since not many companies that follow into the footsteps of this one succeed. The issues we found were mostly in store glitches that should be definitely addressed and patched. Farthing into explanation stores suffer from an enormous gap between the Upper Management and the Sales Associates/ Cashiers. As previously mentioned only managers met on a regular basis discarding the rest of the staff. Neglecting the importance of meeting with the rest of the staff and opening a channel of communication between the managers and the rest of the employees led to further problems. Employees felt left out and had no loyalty because they were stripped from the sense of entitlement by not being involved or able to voice their opinions. A way to address this issue is enhance the communication between the managers and the staff in order to provide a comfortable work environment for the staff where their loyalty with lead to genuine excitement. Another issue is the imbalance of task distribution that falls upon all the employees bellow the managers. Balancing out the tasks between regular staff and managers can benefit the company. Hiring additional personnel’s to assist with specific tasks will also improve the dynamics of the company.

**Section 3.2 : Human Resource**

The main areas of conflict ,highlighted by the HR analysis, points towards the text book scenario of an unhealthy work place environment and the negative consequences that it incurs. As indicated by multiple employee interviews, A I X implements fairly negative managerial tactics in looking to incentivize productivity and growth. Timings are non-negotiable, training is inadequate, sales commission competition is cutthroat, Managers openly poach sales - these patterns clearly indicate the presence of McGregor'sTheory X school of thought, whereby employees are seen as idle and solely motivated by money. As pointed out by Chris Argyris, such a hostile working environment can result in several negative impacts . "If the individual finds satisfaction and meaning in work, the organization profits from effective use of individual talent and energy. If not, individuals withdraw, resist, or rebel. In

the end, everyone loses " ( Bolman and Deal, 2008 ). As a result ,the situation where Randheer was ignored by the employees can be deduced as a direct result of employee dissatisfaction manifesting itself in the form of passive indifference.

The focus of the recommendations, concerning the HR frame, would involve a 3 step program centering on "keeping the employees", "investing in them", and "empowering them". There are many facets to be considered in the execution of these recommendations. Firstly, and most importantly, there exists a pivotal need for the introduction and incorporation of specialist sales training programs. This investment, as way of providing information and support, would effectively empower employees to produce a higher quality of service. Secondly, it is vital that competitiveness be reduced in the environment in order to appeal to the basic needs of employees. This can easily be achieved by protecting jobs and promoting from within. Job protection can be attained by redesigning work and implementing a different pay system for managers, separate from commissions and sales of ground staff. This will work hand in hand with in-house promotion schemes as employees would look forward to a managerial experience that is different from sales. Following such a program would essentially provide employees with the self-fulfillment and actualization, resulting in a more receptive and welcoming work environment. It is crucial to note, however, that "no single strategy is

likely to be effective by itself. Success typically requires a comprehensive strategy undergirded

by a long-term human resource management philosophy. "( Bolman and Deal, 2008 )

**Section 3.3 : Political**

In conclusion, it is an impossible task maneuvering around organizational politics. Organization management should not try to eliminate the politics, but just minimize it to healthy levels where the organization can perform optimally. Concerning the Armani situation, the top management of the organization should put in place strategic measures to ensure that such an incidence does not happen again. This is because; customers like Randheer contribute a significant part in building or destroying the company’s goodwill.

In relation to all the elements of the political frame, there are varying recommendations that can be implemented. As aforementioned, it would be beneficial to expect potential coalitions as it can aid A | X to establish important political strategies (negotiable issues, securing ties with key supporters). Moreover, differences between the persons at Armani can be mitigated by holding meetings in the respective stores to outline the actions of employees (specifically when Randheer entered the store). Constructive criticism would prove to help the employees as a collaborative unit. In relation to allocating scarce resources, the employees were focusing on short-term objectives of high sales. This relates back to the meetings; the interview with the former employee outlined that there are no monthly team meetings unlike many other businesses that include ALL staff (only management). Furthermore, management must utilize power astutely. Orders are followed out of respect and/or fear; when employees saw that the manager was not present, they did not exercise their role to the full potential. These type of situations can be lessened by ensuring there is a manager on the floor at all times as well as cameras in the building (if cameras are already placed; stress the fact that they are being watched). Lastly, in terms of goals and decisions, managers must settle on a collaborative decisions which entails the betterment of Armani as a whole.

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**Section 5 : Appendices**

1. Retrieved from: http://www.glassdoor.com/Reviews/Armani-Exchange-Reviews-E233385.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)